

David Hallauer
District Extension Agent, Crops & Soils

Brush Control Using Basal Bark Treatments

While late season drought and the transition to fall has ended some of our late season foliar brush control treatments, it doesn't mean we have to cease brush control operations altogether. There are still options, including basal bark applications.

Basal bark treatment is the application of herbicide to bark at the base of the tree. The herbicide is mixed in an oil-type carrier (diesel, etc...) to enhance penetration of the chemical across the bark to the water/nutrient transporting tissue in the interior of the tree (cambium layer) and the product is liberally applied to the entire circumference of the tree from the ground up to a height of 12 to 18 or more inches. It's an option that often works well from mid-summer to mid-winter when other treatments might be limited due to drought, heat, etc... (avoid treatment when ground is saturated, snow-covered, or frozen), including right now. Two active ingredients – triclopyr and aminopyralid - are used for most basal bark applications and are effective on many woody plant species.

Triclopyr is found in products with the tradenames Remedy Ultra and Pathfinder II or with other active ingredients in combination products. Formulations vary, meaning the oil-based carrier and even control may be slightly different (*always* read and follow label directions).

Aminopyralid is most commonly used on black/common honey locust and is found in Milestone herbicide. It has a different mixing ratio altogether – and some oil bases may *not* be compatible. Adhere to label directions, including conducting a jar test for compatibility.

Basal bark treatments can be a good brush control option, particularly when trying to kill trees standing in an effort to reduce suckers that can result when the main stem is killed using other methods. It needs to be done correctly, however, including application of plenty of product all the way around and up and down the tree. The spray mixture needs to be applied in such a manner to reach the soil line for best results against root collar sprouts.

Basal bark isn't the only option. We'll hit a few more in this space over the next few weeks. If you want a head start, request a copy of the 2024 KSU Chemical Weed Control Guide (also available online) from any District Office and check out the multiple available options.